

Blast from the Past

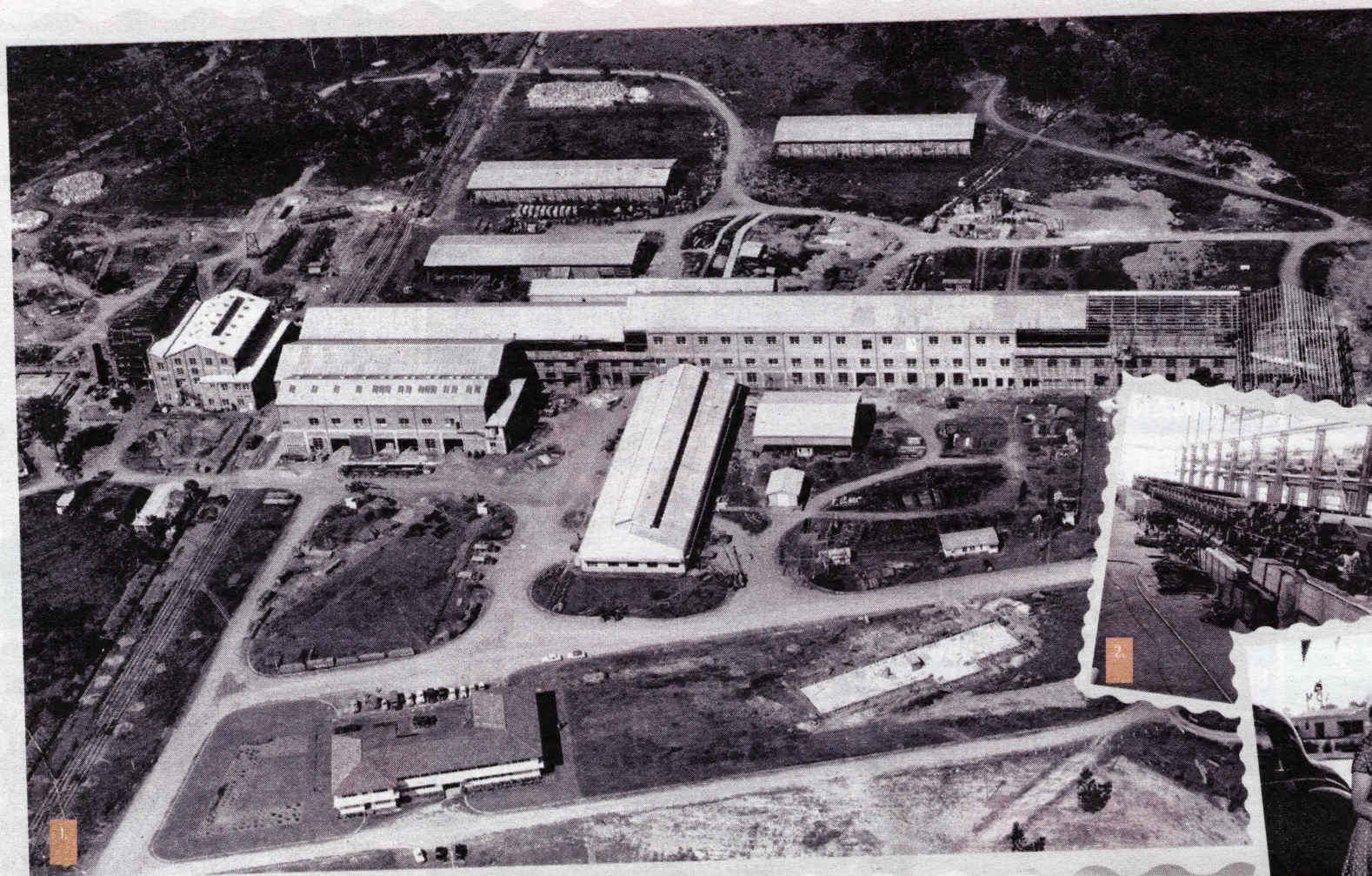
Did you know?

Bing Crosby and Nat King Cole's *Around the World* was the top-selling single in Australia in 1957

MAKING HISTORY

Moreton Bay Regional Council bought the site in August 2015. It is now home to the **USC Moreton Bay** university campus and **The Mill** precinct – two other community-shaping projects.

1. The Petrie Paper Mill nearing completion in 1956 (reference number MBPS-0014-005). 2. Installing the press section in the main building (reference number MBPS-0014-011). 3. Prime Minister Robert Menzies at the official opening (reference number MBPS-0014-205).



PHOTOS: Courtesy of Moreton Bay Regional Council. Visit ourstory.moretonbay.qld.gov.au

How the mill shaped a community

STORY KYLIE KNIGHT

PETRIE, as we know it, could have been vastly different if the Petrie Mill had not come to town.

North Pine Historical Society president Judy Dohle said the township flourished because of the mill, which built homes and had a hand in the development of Lake Kurwongbah and the Pine Rivers Fire Station.

"The whole of Pine, after World War II, was dead up until then. Petrie grew in population and people did come up and move in to get

jobs," Mrs Dohle said.

Back then, Petrie was a small township with about 20 houses, a railway station, post office, small school, two churches, general store, baker, butcher, school of arts hall, a hotel and two bank agencies.

By 1952, when the foundations were being laid at the mill, 60 company houses and a single men's hostel for 40 men had been constructed. The APM sports oval was also built at this time, using spoil excavated for the mill's foundations.

But many do not realise,

the whole operation could have been built at Eagle Farm, instead of Petrie. In 1946, Australian Paper Manufacturers Ltd's Managing Director Sir Herbert Gepp appointed Gus Gehrman to buy land for a new mill under the guise of the top-secret 'Operation Moo Cow'.

He identified two potential sites – one at Eagle Farm and the other at Petrie.

Weighing up the cost of building in the city versus the country, and taking into consideration the potential of expansion, Gepp decided on Petrie. The

site was about 250ha and was occupied by two dairy farms. The mill's construction started in 1951 but stopped in 1952 due to a recession gripping Australia.

When conditions improved in 1955, it recommenced with gusto. The mill was officially opened on December 6, 1957, by Prime Minister Robert Menzies. He was accompanied by his wife Dame Pattie Menzies and other guests included Premier Frank Nicklin and APM Chairman of Directors E. Telford Simpson.

For more than 50 years, the mill was known for its 'Petrie spirit' and sense of community. From its construction to closure, it employed about 5000 people.

At its peak in the early 1960s, it had a staff of more than 500. In its final year of operation, it employed 222. The mill operated around the clock, with three eight-hour shifts. It never needed to advertise for workers because when vacancies became available, they were filled by family members or friends of workers.

"Just about everyone that

lived in Pine Rivers had a relative or member of the family that worked at the mill," Mrs Dohle recalled.

Her father, husband, brothers and other members of the extended family worked there. In 1986, APM was renamed Amcor and the following year the mill celebrated 30 years of operation. The company announced the closure of the mill in February 2013, with production ceasing on September 6, after 56 years of continuous production.

SOURCES: North Pine Historical Society, Moreton Bay Regional Council